

THE Center for Education Reform



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NEWS ALERT

For Immediate Release

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PRESIDENT ADVOCATES FOR SCHOOL CHOICES IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL *"If parents don't have options besides public schools, there is no accountability."*

(Washington, D.C. 7/1/03) Amidst banners calling for "More Choices for Parents," President Bush today announced that he will request from Congress support for a \$75 million choice incentive fund to fuel private school choice and help determine if it will make a difference. "I do believe it will," said the President in endorsing expanded choices for parents.

The President was adamant in his support for choice: "If parents don't have any options besides public schools, there is no accountability. Accountability without consequences means nothing....The system needs to be shaken up."

District of Columbia Mayor Anthony Williams joined the President in agreeing that parents in the District, "should have real choice," not a Hobson's choice. Williams applauded the increased community support for school choice, and said, "despite the heated rhetoric, I am happy to join you in bringing real choices to children."

The Federal choice incentive fund includes \$15 million for scholarships in the District of Columbia, which the President argued "needs to improve." "The District of Columbia scored below every single state in the Union in terms of basic skills and that's unacceptable. It's unacceptable to the Mayor, it's unacceptable to the City Council, it's unacceptable to Peggy [Cooper-Cafritz, school board chair] and it's unacceptable, most importantly, to the parents. And we need to do something about it."

President Bush made the announcement today at the KIPP DC: Key Academy Charter School whose test score gains outrank almost all other public schools in the District. President Bush commended KIPP and reinforced his support for charters. He said, "charter schools say 'If you have a better idea, show up.'" The problem, the President added, is that there aren't enough choices for the children who want alternatives. The President emphasized he is working with Congress to boost the Administration's budget for charters, as well.

In addition to Education Secretary Rod Paige and Mayor Williams, he was joined by Congressman Tom Davis of Virginia, Governmental Operations committee chair and sponsor of the DC Parental Choice Act. The audience was also packed with other government, religious, business and education leaders from the city and nation.

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Today was the first major event at which President Bush unequivocally endorsed the notion of full school choice as part of a legislative package. The endorsement is significant and comes on the heels of several months of negotiating among city leaders to create an education package that supports a variety of choices. The subject of school choice in the District has been debated vigorously since 1996, when the Congress first considered a pilot school choice program for the District. It was vetoed by then President Bill Clinton.

In challenging the establishment that opposes school choice, President Bush implored his audience: "It is now time for our society to challenge failure."

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For more information about school choice, link to <http://www.edreform.com/> and click on the issue of school choice. For more information, contact Mary Kayne Heinze, Media Relations Director (202) 822-9000.

The Center for Education Reform is a national voice for more choices in education and more rigor in education programs. CER celebrates its 10th Anniversary this October.